

Cultural Identity and Place Identity in House Environment: Traditional Turkish House Interiors

NUR AYALP

Interior Architecture and Environmental Design Department
TOBB ETU University
Sogutozu St. Address
TURKEY
nayalp@etu.edu.tr

Abstract: - Home environment is a place that humankind constructed his identity on it. As such, it is the mediator of place identity as well. In collective memory, place identities turns in to cultural identity that reflects the traditional values. The study is focusing on the relations between place identity and cultural identity through the example of typical Traditional Turkish House Interiors. The study set the identity formation through types. The interior design formation of typical interior design elements of Traditional Turkish house is discussed in the context of cultural and place identity concepts.

Key-Words: - Cultural Identity, Place Identity, Traditional Turkish House

1 Introduction

Culture and environment is strongly interrelated with each others. Culture shapes the environment; environment shapes the culture. Especially home environment is the major place that cultural values expressed intensively. Home environment is the most experienced place in person's environmental perception. Humankind develop his environmental perception with the help this experience. In most of interior design projects the main focal point is to make people feel at home. Most advertising projects use this sense as a positive effect. Therefore, the study discussed the cultural and place identity concept especially in the home environment. Cultural identity is discussed in the context of typical interior elements of Traditional Turkish Houses. In other words, the study aims to introduce values and meanings of interior space elements that reflect the cultural identity.

On the other hand, place identity concept is also loaded with these values and meanings. These relations add a new dimension to the environment; as such the space becomes a place.

Form this stand point, formation place identity of Traditional Turkish House is discussed within the context of cultural identity. Besides, interior design formation of Traditional Turkish House is discussed deeply in the light of these concepts.

Interior designer as a professional tries to resolve issues of functionality, aesthetics, and cultural identity and soon on. IFI (International Federation of Interior Architects and Interior Designers) that is widely known as an international committee of interior designers define the profession as:

"As a creative enterprise, interior design and interior architecture are a mode of cultural production. They are a place-maker that interprets, translates, and edits cultural capital. In a global world, interior design and interior architecture must play a role in facilitating the retention of cultural diversity." [11]

2. Culture and Environment

Cultural values are essential in every aspects of our life. It shapes our life styles. Cultural values not only shapes our environments but also shapes the way we perceive the environment

According to Matsumoto the culture is;

- Dynamic,
- Involve a system consist of rules
- Expressed through the community as well as the self unit

- With help of the system it convey the sustainability of vitality of the community
- Involve attitudes, values, belief, norms and behaviours
- Shared with groups
- Interpreted with each member of the community
- Transform to new generation
- However it has the potential of change [4]

Shaping the interior design elements in the house environment is directly related with the living habits. These living habits are rooted in the cultural values. Moreover, each of every cultural values, gain a form in the interior environment. In other world, cultural values give shape to interior environment.

Altman and Chemers, in their book *Culture and Environment*, present examples relating to the interactions between the environment and culture. Especially, they state that different people living in different cultures have different space perceptions; they then go on to establish that culture, environment and the individual constitute a whole. They argue that the parts of this whole cannot be discussed independently of each other and concluded that these interactions together constitute a social system [1].

One example presented in the book is that of the environmental perception of the Mbuti Pygmies who live in Africa. The people live in the rainforest. Since the living environment is pervaded with a dense layer of vegetation, they scarcely perceive the sun, moon and stars. Therefore, the environment for those who live in this culture is more inclined to a horizontal perception rather than vertical. Furthermore, the sky, stars and the sun, attributed religious meaning in several cultures, express no particular meaning in this culture. The formations of cultural meanings which affect the environmental perception have, in this culture, caused the horizontal space perception to develop more than the vertical.

Looked from this perspective, Traditional Turkish House, which has been in continuous use in Turkey from the sixteenth century until now, can be seen as an element of the country's culture.

3. Space and Place Identity in House Environment

This section explores certain concepts which will help explain the interaction that exists between these

internal spaces and their users. There is a complex interaction between a person and a space. The person defines the space, the space defines the person; the person gives meaning to the space, the space gives meaning to the person. In other words, there is a complex and bilateral interaction between the person and the space in its cultural, psychological, economic and physical dimensions. House, where cultural influences may be intensely observed are spaces where this bilateral interaction can also be easily perceived. Rapaport, defines the cultural elements that effect the house formation as below; these are

- Religion,
- Language and these kinds of peculiarities
- The structure of family and relatives
- Child raising methods
- Settlement patterns
- Land division and land owning systems
- Nutrition habits
- Symbolic and traditional systems
- Status defining methods and social identity
- Cognitive maps; privacy, intensity, territoriality
- Behavioural organisation in a house
- Working, business with other and trades. [2]

“With all these cultural, social and psychological impacts it became a home and gains its high symbolic and emotional meaning” [13]

House, home environment can be defined under the concept of place rather than space. According to Hay, when the human element comes into space, space becomes more of a place than a space.[9] Law and Altman have defined the place concept as the space which is given meaning through individual, group or cultural processes.[1] In other words, people can transform spaces into places over a period.

Thus, over the usage process, people create their own place identities and this transform spaces into their own places. This process is defined in the relevant literature as “place identity”. By this definition, identity is described as a biological organisation which develops through adjustment (settlement), assimilation and assessing the social world; and moves over time. [3] Place formation can be defined as the attitude the individual forms towards a certain environment. The concept of place involves not just a physical element but also emotional factors.

In short, the concept of place is fundamental to the individual and space interaction. Place should be perceived as a dimension of space which comes about in the individual's use of the space. From this point of view, home environment can be considered in the heart of our sense of place.

On the other hand, place identity not only affects the perception process, but also shapes the cognition. In most of the scientific studies there has been found relation between the place identity and the cognition process. Also the study finding demonstrate that the process affect with personal and global identity of the self. [8]. Moreover the place identity and the "extended self" concept are related with each other in the relevant literature. In a way, Vignoles and Droseltis defined the extended self concept as "the idea that places are experienced cognitively as 'part of the self'". "The people and places that we encounter, and these identities affect our responses to new events" [8] So, it is clear that different experiences of the self became important in the formation of sense of place. From this point of view, it is definite that experiencing typical features in a certain place is an affective factor in perception of place. According to Schutz people perceive the world through types and these types structured our cognitive schemes. From this point of view Auburn and Barnes summaries the approach as;

"The person's representation or stock of knowledge of the world, first, is social in that its typified content arises in and through the community and its history. Furthermore, typification is underpinned by language, or more precisely the 'vernacular of the collectivity'...". [12]

Consequently, the place identity of house environment is not only typical in our cognition, but also affective in our community identity. Individuals self perception is intimately related to home environment in which he spends most of his time [8]. Also, house is vital environment in formation of place identities. [8] People feel comfortable in places that are concurrent with their place identities. In other word, their psychological, cultural, and social satisfaction is affected with their place identities. Therefore, understanding typical Traditional Turkish House is essential in understanding and giving shape to recent projects.

4. Typical Interior Space Elements In Traditional Turkish House

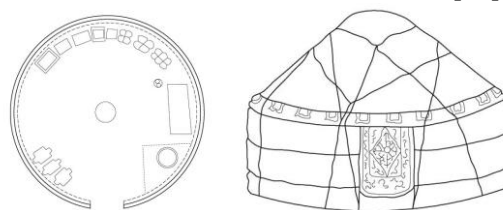
Elements of interior space not only take role in defining the space, but also express the cultural meaning of a place. In a way, they defined the place especially these elements give identity to the interior space. In this section cultural codes related to interior space will be discussed.

The typical formation has been derived from the nomadic culture in 15th century. According to Küçükerman belonging to a nomadic culture creates a disconnection between the feeling of belonging and the land, in a way this leads to an abstract formation of living environment [16].

Nomadic Turkish tend organisation is a reflection of satisfying the basic needs. The tent as a living unit contains *tör*, *saba*, cellar, store units, *çiğ* etc. The fire was in the center of the tent, "*tör*" was the place for storage, "*saba*" was the place for eating storage, "*çiğ*" was the screen that separated the *saba* and cellar.



Picture1. Interior view of Turkish Tent [20]



Picture2. Plan and exterior elevation of Turkish Tent [7]

Due to hard land properties and the climatic factors in the Central Asia, Turks became a nomadic society. Because of this life style there occurred a place identity independent from the land features. In the literature this understanding of place named as

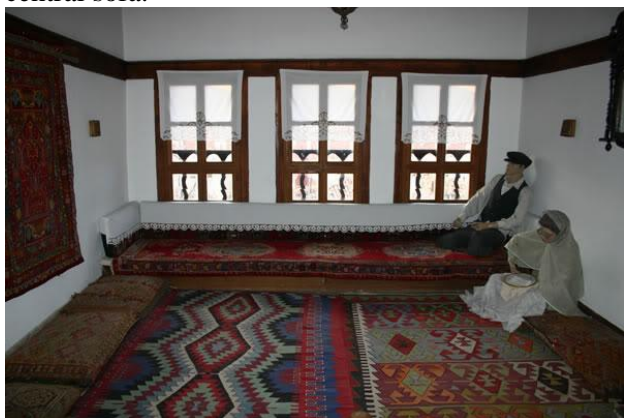
“land autonomous place”. [5] Both this introverted understanding of place and being large family turns in to common gathering place ‘sofa’ in the Traditional Turkish House. Also the living unit as the tent turns in to room in the house.

Nomadic Turks have settled in Anatolia after they adapted Islam as their religion. Deriving from a nomadic culture, adapting to Islam and the environmental characteristics of Anatolia became the main factors effecting the formation of Traditional Turkish House.

The house is mainly divided into two parts: harem which is areas reserved for female members of the family and selamlık which are areas reserved for male members of the family. According to Islamic beliefs, areas of the house for men and women are separate. Basically, house arrangement is limited to one storey; where the top floor is always accepted as the most important part of the house.

There are 3 main elements in the formation of typical traditional Turkish house these are; “oda” room, “eyvan” and the sofa (hayat). Eyvan is the “space between groups or room, it is a passage way in front of the rooms, which permits the common life inside” [7]. Sofa is the main hall that all the rooms are arranged around. It is the space between the rooms. Also, it is a circulation area between rooms. Moreover, it is used as a social area that contains sitting units. According to Küçükerman sofa is the “most important element of the form of the Turkish house and which influences its whole shape” [16].

The leading architect in the architectural history of Turkey Seddat Hakkı Eldem classified the house according to position of the sofa. These are; without a sofa, with an outer sofa, with an inner sofa, with a central sofa.



Picture 3. Room Interior Formation [21]

Another typical element of the house is the room. Each room contains basic living requirements such as; sleeping, eating, sitting, working and resting. Mostly, the plan diagrams of the rooms are square and each wall is a medium for a different activity. One wall of room can contain storage means, another one can contain fireplace, a sitting unit (sedir) or even a bathroom. On this account Yürekli and Yürekli named the room as a single unit “house”. There are also other specific functions for a single room such as “baş oda” a master room which is the main area and is used as a guest room for the head of the family. [16].



Picture 4. Room Interior [21]



Picture 5. Storage elements [21]

Typical elements in the room are the reflection of elements in single unit tent. When the interior design elements in the room are considered, the build in wardrobes are one of the main elements in the room used for storage purposes. It was the “yüklük” in the tent that contains daily used equipments such as beds, rugs, cups etc. Most of the examples are made of carved wooden elements. Another typical unit is the fireplace that shapes the place identity of the room. The fireplace is used for heating and cooking purposes. In some of the houses it is intensively decorated and adds extra value to the overall atmosphere of the interior. There can be also extra fire element in the center, just like the tent example.



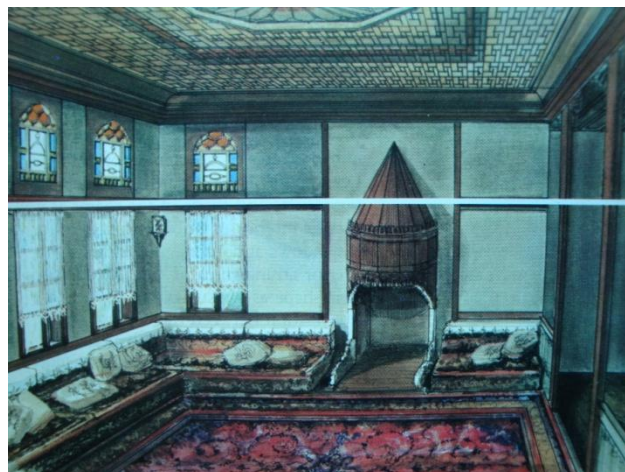
Picture 6. Built in Wardrobe in the wall [17]

The sedir is the main sitting unit in the room. Mostly these units are located under windows. They continuously surround the room and are elevated from the ground. The ground cover is also an important element in the interior environment. The importance is derived from its function. Most of the functions take place on the ground just like the sitting on the ground in the tent. “If a respected visitor should arrive and there is no room on the sedir, the younger members of the family will give up their seats on the sedir and sit on the floor” [16]. All the ground is covered with carpet, kilim or cushion. These carpets express the typical aesthetic values regarding traditional Anatolian motifs that also resample the tent interior. This surface treatment is a typical element that defines the place identity of the interior.

Despite these furniture, the ceiling is also an important interior element with its typical ornamentations. Ceiling decoration is built up of polygonal pendant wood elements fixed one on top of the other. Also in most of the examples, there are horizontal elements that limits the height of doors and windows and can also be used as a shelf unit. This horizontal timber unit is a very typical element in the room. All furniture in the room is limited under this horizontal line. “the basic principle that utility areas should not exceed human stature brought about a tangible, visible upper limit” [16].



Picture 7. Room Ceiling [16]



Picture 8. Horizontal element in the room Interior [16]

As it can be perceived that the room interior is a multifunctional area just like in the tent. The identity of the interior is derived from these cultural living habits. These typical elements are vital in users' experience in a way that these typical elements reflect an image in the users' cognition. The cognitive process is formed by traditional types that are shaped through history. From this point of view, we can easily perceive the affects of cultural identity on the formation of place identity through the typical feature.

5. Socio-Cultural Changes In Traditional Turkish House

The spatial separation of woman and man in the house changed after the declaration of new Republic in 1923. With the reformation in woman rights woman started to take role in the exterior social and working life. “The patriarchal family structure has turned to the basic family structure”. [10] In addition, technological changes took place after the industrial development; effect the spatial organization of the house. Before these changes, limited number of houses had running water and electricity. Western lifestyle effected the family formation. Moreover, large agricultural family societies, turned in to small families in industrial societies. [6]

In 1930, the fist social housing project is constructed in Turkey. Also, foreign architects started to develop projects in Turkey. Therefore, the organization the houses effected from these western approaches. Local people migrated to the big cities, and left their houses for better living conditions. With the increase in population housing demands increase. Housing concept changed from single

family building to apartment complex. Also, lack of awareness in protection ended up with demolished traditional houses. [14]

6. Conclusion

All of these complex social changes create a new housing concept in Turkey. Unfortunately this new approaches are far from reflecting the cultural identity of Turkey. Besides, it is far from reflecting the typical place identity of Traditional Turkish House. This cultural value that reflects our life style became old not reinterpreted in order to adopt the new.

House environment with its typical elements not only is vital formation of place identities but also shape the cultural values. It is a fact that, humankind feels comfortable in places that are concurrent with their place identities. In other word, their psychological, cultural, and social satisfaction is affected with their place identities. Reflecting true cultural identities are essential in satisfying these needs. Therefore, understanding typical elements that are reflecting cultural identities in a house environment is essential in giving shape to recent projects. Just with this level of consciousness, these cultural values in interior environment have a change to survive in our new life styles.

REFERENCES

- [1]A. Irwin, Chermers M, . *Culture and Environment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1989
- [2]A. Rapaport (1969) *House Form and Culture* Englewood:Prentice Hall
- [3]C Twigger-Ross, L Uzzell . *'Place and Identity Processes'* Journal of Environmental Psychology 16, p.p 205-220. 1996
- [4]D, Matsumato 2000 *Culture and Psychology*. San Francisco: Wadworth.
- [5]E, Aksoy 1963 "Orta Mekan: Türk Sivil Mimarisinde Temel Kuruluş Prensipleri" İstanbul:Mimarlık ve Sanat, 7-8: 39-73.
- [6]E. Gültekin, Uçar, A. "Traditional Akseki Houses and Cultural Heritage Tourism" International Journal of Energy and Environment WSEAS Press Issue 5/5 661-668, 2011.
- [7]G, Cagdas "A Shape Grammar: The Language of Traditional Turkish Houses" *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* Volume 23 Issue 4 443-464 1996
- [8]H. Prohanskey, H. Fabian and R., Kamirnof (1983) "Place Identity:Physical world socialization of the self. Journal of Environmental Psychology,3, 57-83.
- [9]H. Robert , "Sense of Place in Developmental Context". *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 18, 1998 p. 5-29.
- [10]I, Ozdemir, A, Gencosmanoglu "Metamorphism in culture and housing design: Turkey as an example" *Building and Environment* 42 1445-1452 2007.
- [11]IFI "the international federation of Interior Architects/ Designers" www.ifiworld.org.
- [12]L, Uzell, 'Interpreting Our Heritage: A Theoretical Interpretation in DL Uzell and R. Ballantyne (eds.) *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation: Problems and Prospect*'. London: The Stationery Office.pp. 11-25. 1998
- [13]M, Bozdayi (1992) *Geleneksel Anadolu Oda Kavramının Çağdaş Konut Tasarımında Modul Kavramı Olarak Değerlendirilmesi* Profficiency in Arts Thesis Hacettepe University:Ankara
- [14]N, Ayalp, M, Bozdayı (2011) "Sustainability of Authentic Cultural Tourist Setting: Traditional Turkish House Interiors" 2nd International Conference on Urban Sustainability, Cultural Sustainability, Green Development, Green Structures and Clean Cars (USCUDAR'11) September 26-28 2011, p.p 142-147, Prague Czech Republic.
- [15]N. Schultz, "Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture, Rizzoli
- [16]O, Kucukerman, *Turkish House: In Search of Spatial Identity*, (Apa Ofset Press, Istanbul) 1985.
- [17]R, Gunay, *Safranbolu Houses*, (YEM Yayınevi, Istanbul) 2005
- [18]T. Auburn, and Barnes, R. Producing place: a neo Schutzian perspective on the 'psychology of place.' *J. Environ.Psychol.*, 26, 38-50, 2006
- [19]U, Tuztas, 2010, "Formal and Scientific Explanatons for Diffeentiation of the İdeal Ottoman Turkish house from Anatolian Houses" *The Journal of International Social Research*, Volume: 3 Issue: 14 497-510
- [20]"GelenekselTurkEvleri"2011www.diyemediklerim.com
- [21]"SafranboluEvleri"2011 www.karadenizgezi.net